

**The School of Economics and Finance
Postgraduate Research
Student Staff Liaison Committee
Thursday 27 February 2020**

Approved Minutes

Staff members present:

Dr. Alessandra Bonfiglioli (AB)	Director of Graduate Studies (Chair)
Sarolta Laczo (SL)	MRes Director
Chandani Amin (CA)	PhD Administrator (Secretary)

Student members present:

Name	Programme and level
Ezgi Kurt	MRes Economics
Laura Perez (LP)	1 st year PhD
Yannis Papadakis (YP)	2 nd year PhD
Elisa Facchetti (EF)	3 rd year PhD
Alex Kontoghiorghes (AK)	4 th year PhD

Apologies for absence: Maddalena Ronchi (MR)

Part 1: Preliminary items

Minutes of the previous meeting

2019:20	The minutes from the previous meeting have not yet been approved.
2019:21	ACTION: CA to request approval for previous minutes after the meeting.

Part 2: Student reports

Reports from student course representatives

The Committee **received** reports from student course representatives and **noted** the following:

Alex Kontoghiorghes noted the following issues relating to the 4th cohort:

2019:22 AK noted that nothing has been mentioned regarding teaching over the Summer. AB responded that students are still contracted in 4th year if they are still writing up and have not yet submitted their thesis.

2019:23 **ACTION:** AB to ask Guglielmo Volpe what happens with 4th year teaching contacts during the Summer.

2019:24 AK asked how Job market funds will be allocated. AB responded that there is usually £400 available for the European Market with extra funding available for the US market. How these funds will be distributed will be discussed by the GSC.

2019:25 **ACTION:** AB to update Committee when job market funding information is available following discussion with GSC.

2019: 26 AK noted issues with the Principle TA contracts. Usually more experienced teachers becomes the Principle TAs but there is no extra benefit. It would be fine if this was compensated.

2019: 27 AK asked about funding for presenting at international conferences – is there additional funding available for this? AB responded that the School is aware that it is important to present at big conferences. The School may be able to complement finances selectively and subject to availability. Students should first apply to the PGRF or Economic Society but if this fails can make a request to the School.

2019:28 AK noted issues with PhD supervision and the working environment in the School. He noted that there is a lot of heterogeneity between how students are supervised. AK suggested that supervisors may need training to ensure the basic supervisory guidelines are followed to increase consistency between student experiences with supervisors. AK noted there have been a lot of bad interactions reported and receiving negative feedback can really affect a student's mental health and have ongoing consequences. AK suggested that more supportive and pastoral care is required to improve the working environment as well as basic training on how you should address and treat colleagues.

AB responded that all PhD supervisors are required to take the QM PhD Supervision training but that does not guarantee they have the level of training you are highlighting. Generally, if a student has any problems the guidelines are to refer them to counselling. There have been discussions about supervisors taking courses on mental health but this is not guaranteed. The School is aware it can be very hard and similar issues can arise between colleagues. We make all efforts to

help you deliver the best, especially with representing the School on the market.

AK responded that there needs to be a conscious effort to ensure staff know how they treat people is extremely important. AK asked if the Head of School could send out an email or mention this at a staff meeting? This would be enough for students to feel something is being done. It needs to be noted that students may not make any official or informal complaints to staff members despite adverse negative effects or feeling like the environment is hostile. AK noted that students are happy and thankful for all efforts that have been made but there are interactions which could be improved for the student experience.

EK asked about whether formal complaints should be made to HR. AB responded that only very serious cases would be made as an official complaint to HR.

2019:29 LP asked about the meetings with GSC representatives that was discussed at the last SSLC meeting? AB responded that a schedule needs to be created.

2019:30 **ACTION:** AB to draft a schedule for student meetings with GSC representatives.

Elisa Facchetti noted the following issues relating to the 3rd year PhD cohort:

2019:31 EF asked about the transfer to writing up process. AB responded that the normally students are expected to have a couple of papers finished and they are set to finish on time by the time they apply for writing up status. All the work should be completed and the student should be at the stage for writing up everything. The structure of the thesis must include:

1. Introduction – why all chapters fit together under the umbrella of the title
2. Paper one
3. Paper two
4. Paper three

No conclusion is required as in SEF each paper concludes itself.

2019:32 AB noted that in the end of year report supervisors will comment on a student's progression and make their recommendation to whether the student can submit to writing up status. If there are problems, this may be delayed. Students have until mid-august (one year before deadline for submission) to decide if you can apply for this status. Once in status, students have one year to submit.

AB highlighted that if a student enters writing up status by beginning of 4th year, the student will not be required to pay tuition fees. In the case

that a student has not applied for writing up by beginning of 4th year they will be personally liable for tuition fees. Fees can be paid in instalments (subject to the Finance Office terms and conditions) which is one per semester which means if you apply for writing up status by the end of the first semester you should only need to pay fees for one semester.

2019:33 EF wanted further information on the 4th year teaching contract, including teaching allocation and number of hours, given that her cohort will no longer be covered by the Scholarship. AB responded that officially the School can offer a teaching contract once writing up status is approved. However, if a student knows they are doing well and on track they are welcome to approach Guglielmo Volpe or Thomai Filippeli about contracts in advance. They can advise about the contracts and how they are scheduled.

2019:34 EF asked what happens if a student does not approach Guglielmo Volpe or Thomai Filippeli about contracts. AB responded that these contracts are not automatic and if you are interested you must apply. Students are also welcome to look at other universities.

AB added that if you obtain a contract with QM you also get the £1000 research budget allowance. YP asked what happens if a student does not get offered a contract here, are they then cut off from the research allowance as well? AB responded that she will need to ask Michelle.

2019:35 **ACTION:** AB to discuss research allowance access in cases where students do not take up a TA contact at QM.

2019:36 AB noted that if students are offered a better contract or salary at another university but would prefer to work at QM they should talk to their DGS who can discuss this with Sujoy/ Michelle.

2019:37 AB noted that Guglielmo Volpe is leaving QM before Summer exams but Thomai Filippeli will remain responsible for teaching contracts.

Yannis Papadakis noted the following issues relating to the 2nd year PhD cohort:

2019:38 YP asked about the possibility of the School hosting tailored workshops on topics including how to write an economics paper or how to present a paper. AB and SL agreed that all current students hold so much soft knowledge and gain experience through learning, reading papers, exposure to conferences and speakers. AB suggested that if students are really interested in this type of workshop to make a request to Sujoy.

Laura Perez noted the following issues relating to the 1st year PhD cohort:

- 2019:39 LP noted that some students end up teaching modules they do not know anything about. AK responded that usually Guglielmo asks students for a list of 5/6 courses they know about. LP asked about how allocations are prioritised. AB also noted that successful TAs are sometimes requested to repeat the same modules. AB suggested these students speak to Guglielmo or Thomai directly regarding teaching allocations.
- 2019:40 LP asked about why students need to complete supervision logs and interim/ annual reports. AB responded that there needs to be a clear record of what has happened in each semester as well as documentary evidence of the relationship between a supervisor and student which is available to the College. This information is also a paper trail which can be used in the event that any complicated cases arise.
- 2019:41 LP asked if it is provide a list of data sets the faculty has that students can use? YP reported that he requested this information from Donald Wu and was sent a list of available data. AB noted that there is also individuals who buy datasets for specific projects.
- 2019:42 **ACTION:** AB to ask the Faculty and all students to report on the data they are using.
- 2019:43 LP asked if it is possible to have talks on more general topics similar to the Peston Lecture? AB responded that there are policy events with speakers from the School involved in progress but the dates have not been set yet.
- 2019:44 **ACTION:** AB to convey student interest for general talks (similar to Peston Lecure) to Sujoy.
- Ezgi Kurt noted the following issues relating to the MRes cohort:
- 2019:45 EK suggested that in the Econometrics modules in Semester A it would have been better if students were able to practice applications of problem sets. Although there is an applied part that could be included in the syllabus both mid-terms were theoretical.
- 2019:46 EK also noted that for Semester B Micro/ Macro modules there could be more engagement for MRes students. The expectation is that students only read or listen to others present papers. EK suggested it would be very beneficial to have practice replicating this, for example if presentations were given throughout the module so learning was interactive and feedback welcome from other students.
- 2019:47 EK noted that the workload was unevenly distributed with too much work in Semester A and too little in Semester B.

- 2019:48 EK noted that MRes students need more guidance on how to obtain a suitable supervisor for their dissertations. Students are unsure of who to approach and how. SL responded that if you are struggling to find a supervisor your first point of contact should be your MRes mentor who can guide you. AB added that students can also approach your module leaders if you wish to write a dissertation with them.
- 2019:49 EK noted that there is not much interaction between MRes students and the Faculty. AB responded that MRes students are welcome to participate in internal seminars by attending (not presenting).
- 2019:50 EK asked about an Applied Micro reading group that students had heard about and if there were other groups like this, are they self-managed or structural? EF responded that the Applied Micro reading group is an internal group of PhD students who use an email list to circulate information about the group to interested parties. It usually begins from Year 1 PhD onwards but if you are interested we can include MRes students in the email list. LP suggested that at the beginning of the MRes year it would be useful to let MRes students know about groups like this and ask if they would be interested. AK added that if any student is lost or unsure about something they are always welcome to ask the senior PhD students.
- 2019:51 EK noted discrepancies between some information in the handbook and the website. AB responded that the handbook is under heavy revision. CA asked if there is any specific contractions to email them for review.
- 2019:52 **ACTION:** EK to email CA with any issues found with information on website or handbook.
- 2019:53 EK noted that there is no garbage bin in the MRes Office. AB responded that either a request can be put to Estates or students can self-manage this.
- 2019:54 EK asked if it would be possible for MRes students to access all modules on QM plus? CA responded that access is automatic from module registration from MySIS so any additional any requests for module access need to be requested to the PGR Administrator by email.

Part 3: Programme delivery and other matters

Other matters

Teaching contracts for Year 5 students

2019:55 AB summarised that the current teaching contract system for the first three PhD years is that students are contracted to work a number of hours through the requirements for their stipend. In 4th year, students no longer have the stipend or tuition fees once in writing up status so the School can offer teaching contracts with a limited number of hours based on College rules. The rate of pay for his is already higher than external teachers are paid and is at the maximum so will not be increased.

2019:56 AB explained that for 5th year students, who have completed their PhD, can legally be hired as Associate Teachers and offered the same type of contract that external teachers are offered through HR. Currently there are two types of contracts available:

1. 4 classes per week (20 hours per week) 16-17K salary
2. 8 classes per week (35 hours per week) up to 30k salary

AB reported that a third contract will be offered:

3. 6 classes per week (28 hours per week) 22-23k salary

AB noted that the Faculty is nervous about having special treatment for our previous students over external teachers as this third contract will not be offered externally. However, it would be useful to be flexible if scheduling would allow for job market fly outs. Guglielmo or Thomai may be reluctant but this could potentially be scheduled if requested well in advance.

AB noted that contracts are not guaranteed and are subject to good performance in previous years.

AK noted that 6 hours per week may still be too much in the build up to the job market. AB suggests students should discuss this with Guglielmo or Thomai as soon as possible.

Date and evaluation criteria for Year 1 progression (PhD Conference)

2019:57 AB stated that if further information needed regarding this then students are welcome to email her directly.

PhD Offices – Desk space

2019:58 AB summarised that the School is investigating whether it is possible for additional desks to be placed in the PhD offices (GC5.26 & GC4.25) to accommodate some of the MRes students. The reason for this is to make space for the additional academic staff that the School will be recruiting so the current MRes Office is needed for staff office space.

Estates have advised that the desk size normally given to PhD students is 1200mm x 800mm, however the desks in these rooms are currently larger at 1400mm x 800mm. Therefore, we could create additional desks by replacing the current sized desks with the smaller versions. There are 27 desks at the moment in each room, and by replacing the desks we'd be able to have 34 desks in each room. This would mean we'd create 7 more desks in each room, which should not only allow more space for the current MRes, but also means there is additional space when we have to accommodate 2 years of the MRes programme (providing the MRes still operate a hot-desk, rather than having a desk each).

The changes will take place before the new MRes cohort start. AB asked that if there are any complaints or suggestions regarding this proposal please send them directly to Michelle.

AB added that she has raised concerns regarding temperature control once the room occupation increases.

YP noted that sometimes students do not use their allocated desks.

2019:59 **ACTION:** AB to email the proposal for the new PhD/ MRes office layout.

Careers support for PhD students

2019:60 CA asked all student representatives to speak to their cohorts about whether there is interest in the School putting on events that will help PhD students who are considering non-academic careers.

The following event options were given:

- 1) A panel on 'careers outside of academia' (speakers to include QM PhD graduates now working in sectors like banking/consultancy; possibly relevant employers too)
- 2) A workshop about career management for PhDs (relevant to both academic careers and non-academic careers). This would look at PhD transferable skills, the differences between academic and non-academic CVs, and career planning for both.

The Committee agreed that all cohorts were interested in the second option. YP suggested that a better option for the first event would be to invite past students/ alumni to talk about their experiences which could be an informal event, internally managed by School.

2019:61 **ACTION:** CA to report interest back to Alex Nowosiad, the Schools Research Manager.

2019:62 **RA work at SEF**

The Committee did not have time to discuss this during the meeting. AB has noted that current students are not able to swap teaching hours for RA hours. The offer they accepted specifies teaching and not RA duties. If this changes in the future, this would only apply to future cohorts.

Any other business

2019:63 No other business was discussed by the Committee.

Date of the next meeting

2019:64 The Committee did not discuss the date of the next meeting. The next meeting usually takes place in October/ November.

Action Sheet: Student-Staff Liaison Committee

Minute	Action	Progress	Responsibility	Timescale
2019:21	CA to request approval for previous minutes after the meeting.		CA	Completed
2019:23	AB to ask Guglielmo Volpe what happens with 4th year teaching contacts during the Summer.		AB	
2019:25	AB to update Committee when job market funding information is available following discussion with GSC.		AB	
2019:30	AB to draft a schedule for student meetings with GSC representatives.		AB	
2019:35	AB to discuss research allowance access in cases where students do not take up a TA contact at QM.	Completed 02/03/2020 – Ale emailed Committee and the £1000 research budget will still be available to 4 th Year students who do not take up a TA contract at QM.	AB	
2019:42	AB to ask the Faculty and all students to report on the data they are using.		AB	
2019:44	AB to convey student interest for general talks (similar to Peston Lecure) to Sujoy.		AB	
2019:53	EK to email CA with any issues found with information on website or handbook.		EK	
2019:59	AB to email the proposal for the new PhD/ MRes office layout.		AB	
2019:61	CA to report interest back to Alex Nowosiad, the Schools Research Manager.	Completed 06/03/2020	CA	